
Report to the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow from the Central Executive Committee of the United Communist Party in New York, Sept. 14, 1920

Document in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 8-12.

New York, Sept. 14, 1920.

To the Executive Committee
of the Communist International

Comrades:—

In a previous report we set forth the circumstances attending the formation of the United Communist Party, which includes the former membership of the Communist Labor Party and a faction of the Communist Party of America estimated at about 60 percent. This report will give you the facts in regard to the party work during the 3 and a half months since the Unity Convention [Woodstock, NY: May 15-28, 1920].†

The Party Strength.

According to the reports of the delegates attending the Unity Convention, these delegates represented 10,644 members. The membership figures were based upon the number of members participating in the election of the delegates. Of these members about 40 percent were in the former Communist Labor organization and 60 percent in the faction of the Communist Party of America. The task which represented itself to the Central Executive Committee was to weld this membership into one homogeneous organization. Practically all of the month of June [1920] and part of

the month of July was given to the creation of the new party organization. Although the party organization was established on a solid foundation during the first 6 weeks of work and is now capable of united and aggressive action, the task of drawing into it all the elements represented at the convention is not yet complete, as the available membership figures indicate a membership at the present moment of about 7,000.

Additions to this membership are being made daily, however, through the party reaching elements of the former Socialist Party, which, through the SP Split of last year, the formation of two parties, the widespread raids and arrests of last January [1920], were separated from the central organizations. Thus, at the present time, the party is making good progress in reorganizing as part of the UCP the former Hungarian Federation of the Communist Party of America, which separated from the CP of A at the time of the January raids; it is reaching out among the Swedish workers, whose Federation has remained independent since the split in the SP; and we are also carrying on aggressive organization work in the Finnish Federation, which separated from the SP at the time of the split, remaining independent for some months and then rejoining the SP, and in which a Left Wing, consisting in part of Communist elements, has developed. The Finnish Federation has for many years been the strongest language group organization in the SP and is now the main reliance of that organization. It is very likely that this Federation will again withdraw from the Socialist

†- Note that the actual duration between the end of the Woodstock Unity Convention and the writing of this report was 4-1/2 months, not 3-1/2 months.

Party as a whole and that we will be successful in organizing several thousands of its member for the UCP.

Some progress is being made in bringing into the party American elements of the former SP, which mostly disappeared from the two parties at the time of the raids, and we are also reaching out to secure new elements among the American workers. This work, however, advances very slowly, due to the difficulties of destroying the illusions in regard to the “democratic institutions” of this country, which have a strong hold on the minds of the American workers, and which make it difficult to educate them to the necessity of illegal work and membership in an underground organization.

If, by the end of the year, we create an organization of 10,000 active members, firmly welded together and organized for quick action, our expectations will be realized.

Agitation and Propaganda.

The difficulties attending the conduct of agitation and propaganda in a country in which the workers read and speak such a great number of languages as in the United States is indicated in the fact that thus far our program has been published and distributed in the following 15 languages: Armenian, English, Estonian, Finnish, German, Hungarian, Jewish [Yiddish], Yugoslav (Croatian), Italian, Lettish [Latvian], Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian.†

Our official organ, *The Communist*, has been published once in each of these 15 languages and is coming out each 2 weeks in English, Hungarian, Polish, and Russian, and once each month in German, Jewish [Yiddish], Yugoslav (Croatian).

In addition to the official illegal organ of the party, we publish an English legal weekly [*The Toiler*] and an Estonian legal weekly [*Uus Ilm*]. Also a Jewish paper bi-weekly [*Der Proletarier*].

At the time of the crisis which developed in connection with the advance of the Red Army into Poland and the efforts of the Allies to rally support for

Poland, we distributed two leaflets appealing to the American workers to support Soviet Russia by refusing to handle any munitions of war.‡ Mass meetings were also held in some sections of the country under the name of legal organizations. A resolution to the same effect was drawn and sent to tour members for introduction in trade unions of which they are members.

We have also issued a number of other leaflets in connection with strikes and the election campaign, notably a leaflet directed against the Socialists expelled from the New York legislature, who shamefully betrayed the workers in their defence. Our policy in the election campaign this year, in which it is impossible for us to put up candidates, is “Boycott the elections.”

At the present time we have in preparation an edition of *The State and Revolution*, by Comrade Lenin, which hitherto has not been available in English for the American workers. We are also publishing under the name of our legal publishing association Comrade Zinoviev’s speech on the life of Lenin.§

Classes for the work of educating our membership in the fundamentals of Communist principles are being organized on a widespread scale, and we expect good results from this work in developing a larger force of capable workers.

The difficulties of illegal publication of our literature are great and have hampered our work. The solution of this problem in a more permanent form is a question of organization and finances, to which we are addressing ourselves.

Shop Organizations.

The American movement had not, up to the time of the organization of the UCP, established itself as a considerable influence among the masses. It had consisted, as represented both by the CLP and the CP of A, of agitation organizations which had not direct contact with the workers in the factories and no power of developing united action among them. The UCP has taken up this problem and has developed a program

†- The report actually cites “16” languages, but only lists 15 — the change is made silently below.

‡- These being a leaflet entitled “Stand By Soviet Russia: Proclamation of the United Communist Party of America” (copy in the Comintern Archive, RGASPI, f. 515, op. 1, d. 43, l. 108) and a second leaflet on the Polish situation (title not currently known) which was produced in a press run of 200,000 copies in August 1920.

§- G. Zinovieff, *Nicolai Lenin: His Life and Work*. (Cleveland, OH: Toiler Publishing Association, n.d. [1920]).

of union and shop agitation groups, which are to take the initiative in the organization of shop committees made up of both party and non-party members. A large part of our energy will go into this work as we consider the carrying out of this program vital to our organization. Agitation along this line is also the most important item in the policy of our legal publication [*The Toiler*].

Legal Work.

We have created alongside of the illegal party an organization for the conduct of legal work [The National Defense Committee]. This is done largely under the guise of defense work. The legal committees which conduct this work consists of a limited number of party members, designated by the party organization and working under the strict control of the illegal organization. This organization will be used to raise funds, to hold mass meetings, and for such other legal work as may develop from time to time.

Information Bureau.

As requested through Comrade Linde [CI Rep Samuel Agursky], the party has organize a bureau to supply the International with the leading American labor publications and the representative capitalist publications. These are now being sent forward weekly to addresses arranged.

The Prosecutions.

Hundreds of deportation cases growing out of the January [1920] raids are still pending and scores of members of our organization still face prosecution. Two members of our Executive Committee, together with 18 other comrades, were recently convicted of "conspiracy to overthrow the government." Three other members of the Executive Committee will face trial soon. Two are fugitives for whom the authorities are looking, but who continue their work in the party. Much of the funds collected by the party have been consumed by legal defense and relief work. Three members of the party — James Larkin, Benjamin Gitlow, and Harry Winitsky — are serving sentences of 5 to 10 years for their activities in the movement.

The IWW.

Since the appeal of the Executive Committee [of the Comintern] to the IWW has reached this country, there has been a more friendly attitude on the part of that organization to the UCP, although it maintains its former theoretical position. *The One Big Union Monthly* and *Solidarity*, weekly and monthly official organs of the IWW, have published the appeal, which has also appealed in some of the foreign language publications of the IWW. This took place, however, after the UCP had published the appeal in its official organ and also printed it as a leaflet for distribution among the members of the IWW.

A UCP group is being organized among the leaders of the IWW and negotiations, which may lead to a conference of representatives of the two Executive Committees, are now underway.

Communist Unity.

There still remains outside of the United Communist Party a faction of the former Communist Party of America. This faction consists largely of the Lithuanian Federation and part of the Ukrainian, Lettish [Latvian], and Russian Federations.

Comrade Linde [Agursky], who has been in this country for several months as the representative of your committee, has met with our committee and also with the representatives of this group of the Communist Party of America, in an effort to bring about unity. We have indicated to him our willingness to discuss the question with the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of America, and to take any action necessary to bring this element into the united party, having even elected two representatives of our committee to meet with a similar committee from the CP of A at any time they are ready to open negotiations.

From the report of Comrade Linde [Agursky] to us we understand that his efforts have met with a rebuff, the CEC of the CP of A refusing to enter into any discussion of the question.

While we do not consider what remains of the CP of A can gain any considerable influence or play any important role in the Communist movement in

this country, the existence of such a group, which may at a critical moment issue appeals in the name of Communism as against those of the UCP, and thus create confusion in the minds of the workers, is a force bringing disorganization into the movement, and therefore our policy is directed toward the elimination of this group by absorbing it into the united party.

Most of the present CP of A propaganda consists of attacks on individual members of the UCP, but out of the discussion which has taken place the following points of disagreement on tactical questions has developed:

1. The CP of A declares that the Communist shop branches form the basis of the Soviets; the UCP that Shop Committees made up of party and non-party members in which the party members form a separate group, are the basis for the Soviets.

2. The CP of A contends that illegality is in itself something to be desired and attacks the UCP for developing legal work along side of its illegal work.

3. The CP of A disagrees with our policy of developing a friendly understanding with the IWW on a Communist basis, and in endeavoring to split the AF of L and unite the advanced elements in a revolutionary industrial union, including the IWW. It takes the position that it is too late to undertake this work.

4. On the question of armed insurrection, the UCP policy is to carry on a systematic and persistent campaign of education to familiarize the workers with the necessity of using armed force in the final revolutionary struggle for power, whereas the CP of A considers it an indication of its "revolutionary" character to call for the use of armed force under every conceivable circumstance, as in a leaflet issued in connection with a petty economic strike of an entirely reactionary character by New York City street car workers. "The Communist Party of America sounds the call for revolution, for armed uprising of all the workers." We consider the issuance of such "calls" at a time when the

social and industrial conditions have not yet developed in the masses the slightest tendency toward revolution and when such a call arouses among these workers merely derisive laughter, the work of irresponsible emotionalists who believe they can build up a Communist movement by shouting strong phrases at the workers.

While these points of disagreement exist, we do not believe that they offer any insurmountable difficulties to unity, as they are merely the vagaries of a few leaders of the CP of A group and have no solid foundation in the ideas of the membership of that organization.

From a member of the CEC of the CP of A, who is friendly to unity [Max Cohen?], we understand that the majority of their committee will resist the effort for unity until they receive an imperative mandate from the Executive Committee of the International to unite. They do not consider the instructions in regard to unity between the CLP and CP of A as applying to the present situation.

We believe that such a mandate from the Executive Committee of the Communist International would be a material gain for the American movement. As the basis for achieving this unity the plan suggested as the means of uniting the former CLP and CP of A, which was practically the plan carried out by the CLP and the faction of the CP of A which is in the united party, might again be adopted.†

Present Conditions and the Future.

The industrial situation in the United States is favorable for the development of a powerful Communist movement. All signs point to the fact that the capitalist class has determined upon a countrywide attack upon the organized workers. The National Chamber of Commerce, an organization made up of employers, has recently adopted a strongly reactionary program

†- Reference is to a joint unity convention with delegate apportionment made on the basis of dues actually paid. The UCP was all for this model during the short period when it appeared that it was a larger organization than the rump CPA, and thus in the position of controlling the outcome of the prospective unity convention. When it later became clear that the rump CPA was actually the larger of the two groups, the UCP dropped this model like a hot potato, stonewalling demands for merger on this basis. Instead the UCP resumed the historic posture of the (minority) CLP — merger on the basis of equal apportionment of delegates between the merging organizations. The minority UCP sought even more than this, however, demanding the predetermination of the key issue of federation structure. The unified organization's structure was to be a replication of the UCP's model of subordinated federations rather than the CPA's model of semi-autonomous language groups. For the UCP, this was the paramount issue, on which it ultimately emerged victorious, after 2 years of bitter splits and mergers.

to meet the encroachments of the workers, which includes the demand for the open shop.

That an organized effort is being made by the employers to destroy the workers' organizations is indicated in the issues which have arisen in recent strikes. Everything points to the fact that the workers will have to fight a life and death struggle to preserve their organization.

Together with this situation there is increasing unemployment. The capitalist press is just now gloating over the fact that strikebreakers, recruited from among the unemployed, are again available. While unemployment increases and the capitalists try to reduce wages, the cost of living still increases.

These conditions are bound to bring about great industrial struggles in the near future. In fact, a number of such struggles are already underway, notably the strike of 100,000 hard coal miners against a government wage award. At two points federal soldiers are holding industrial centers where the workers are on strike: in Denver, where the street car men are on strike, and in West Virginia, where the coal miners are engaged in something akin to civil war (fighting with rifles in their hands has been going on in this district between miners and the private guards of the coal companies for more than a month).

The government appears more and more openly as the agent of the capitalists in the industrial struggles. It was through the governmental machinery of coercion that the soft coal miners' strike was broken last winter. Since [then] the government has appeared as the agent of the railroads in effecting a settlement with the railroad workers and it also represented the employers in the negotiations preceding the present coal strike. Antagonism to the government grows out of these experiences.

The machinery of production is not functioning efficiently. There is a shortage of coal, due to the industrial struggle in the coal fields and this has affected many industries and promises to bring widespread suffering during the coming winter. The "outlaw" strike (a strike without the sanction of the reactionary trade union leaders) of the railway yardmen

has also seriously affected transportation. This strike is still underway, although officially the men are merely taking a "vacation," this subterfuge being necessary to escape the penalties of a drastic law affecting strikes of transportation workers.

It is not to be understood from the foregoing that any strong movement of a potentially Communist character exists at the present time. This would be misleading. The masses are still upholders of the present system and there is no mass movement of a revolutionary character. But the conditions are developing out of which a mass movement will grow.

The extent to which the party will be able to actively intervene in the developing conflict will depend a great deal upon its financial resources. The capacity of our organization to conduct agitation already outstrips our financial ability to supply the necessary literature. After our unity convention, \$25,000 was made available from an outside source [*sic.*].‡ This amount together with our monthly income from the membership of about \$10,000 will be exhausted by the end of September and we will then have to depend upon our own resources unless other funds reach us. Limiting our work to the financial resources of the organization itself will mean that temporarily we will have to reduce our activities.

We do not know what the resources of the International are and its policy in regard to furnishing assistance to sections of the International. If the Executive Committee is in a position to furnish us aid, we believe that the importance of the work in the United States warrants it doing so. President Wilson's note to Italy is an effort of the world capitalists to stem the tide of revolution and the members of your committee are sufficiently familiar with the general conditions here to understand the importance and the difficulties of our task.

If \$150,000 were made available for our work here, it would make it possible for us to put into effect the program already developed, which would make our party a powerful influence among the American workers. This sum could be easily expended in building up the circulation of our official organ, in publish-

‡- This is a reference to Comintern funds. It was ultimately the only funding which the United Communist Party would receive. A like amount was provided to their factional opponents of the CPA. See: "Foreign Treasury Exchange, January 4, 1922: [A Complete Record of Comintern Subsidies Actually Received by the American Communist Movement, 1919-1921]," by Will Weinstone. Available as a downloadable pdf from www.marxisthistory.org

ing timely leaflets among the workers, in building up the circulation of our legal paper, and in carrying out our program of shop organization. There is also the possibility that we will very shortly attain control of a printing plant capable of publishing a daily legal paper, and our effort would be to establish such a paper at the earliest possible time.

We extend fraternal greetings to the members of the Executive Committee of the International, and assure them that we will carry on the Communist struggle to the limit of our resources and ability.

[I.E. Ferguson]
International Secretary,
United Communist Party of America.

[Alfred Wagenknecht],
Executive Secretary,
United Communist Party of America.

International Delegates,
United Communist Party of America.

David Damm.
[C.E. Ruthenberg].†

†- There are signature lines for each title, blank in this copy. There is a handwritten note in German signed by "S. Fried, Secretary" noting something or other about a copy in Stockholm and (that it will be filed?) with the "Bureau of the Third International in Scandanavia." Signatory as "International Delegates" might have included Edward Lindgren, L.E. Katterfeld, and/or Max Bedacht.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.
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