
Report to the Executive Committee of the Communist International from the United Communist Party, September 14, 1920.

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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 three and a half months since the unity convention [Bridgman, MI: May 26-31, 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 presented itself to the Central Executive Committee was to weld this membership into one homogeneous organization. Practically all the month of June and part of the month of July [1920] 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, 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,

†- A highly optimistic guess, to say the least. The Ruthenberg faction was a distinct minority of the old CPA.

‡- Compare and contrast to the average actually paid membership of 3,466 for the UCP for the 3rd Quarter of 1920 [RTsKhIDNI f. 515, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 25-26].

§- Bear in mind that the dues collection mechanism during the underground period was imperfect and figures for “actually paid membership” represent a significant undercount of the true number of participants in the organization — although this discrepancy between those who paid and those who considered themselves members was probably not of the magnitude claimed here.

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 [5th Convention: Nov. 1919], 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 Party as a whole and that we will be successful in organizing several thousand of its members 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 score 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 [1920] 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 the 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 16 languages: Armenian, English, Estonian, Finnish,

German, Hungarian, Jewish [Yiddish], Yugoslav (Croatian), Italian, Lettish [Latvian], Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Swedish, Spanish, and Ukrainian.

Our official organ, *The Communist*, has been published once in each of the 16 languages, and is coming out once each two 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 legal paper biweekly.

At the time of the crisis which developed in connection 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 our 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 this year, in which it is impossible for us to put up candidates; [the slogan] 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.

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

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 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.

Legal Work.

We have created alongside of the illegal party an organization for the conduct of legal work. This is done largely under the guise of defense work. The legal committees which conduct this work consist of a limited number of party members, designated by 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 [???], the party has organized 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 [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 positions. The *One Big Union Monthly* and *Solidarity*, weekly and monthly official organs of the IWW, have published the appeal, which has also appeared in some of the foreign languages 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.

†- As well as a portion of the Polish and Jewish (Yiddish) Federations.

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 [???], who has been in this country for several months as the representative of your committee, has met with 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 2 representatives of our committee to meet with a similar committee from the CP of A any time they are ready to open negotiations.

From the report of Comrade Linde [???] 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 importance 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 our 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 alongside 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 is endeavoring to split the AF of L and united the advanced elements in 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 streetcar 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 street 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 mem-

†- That is, merger via a Joint Unity Convention in which each party is allocated a set number of delegates to the gathering.

bership of that organization.

From a member of the CEC of the CP of A who is friendly toward unity, 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 DLP [??] and the CP of A as applying to the present situation.

We believe that such a mandate from the Executive Committee to the International would be a material gain to the American movement. As the basis for achieving this unity the plan suggested as the means of uniting the former CLP and the CP of A, which was practically the plan carried out by the CLP and a 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 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 capital-

ists 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 streetmen 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 the government has appeared railroad workers [*sic.*] 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 now 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 transport 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 such 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 [and] the capability of our organization to supply the necessary literature. After our unity convention [May 26-31, 1920] \$25,000 was made available from an outside sources [*sic.*]. This amount together with our monthly income from the membership of about \$10,000 will be exhausted by the end of September [1920] 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 is 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 indication of the part the United States will play in the 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 [*The Communist*], in publishing 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 member 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.

Fraternally yours,

[Isaac E. Ferguson]

International Secretary,
United Communist Party of America.

[Alfred Wagenknecht]

Executive Secretary,
United Communist Party of America.

[???

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International Delegates,
United Communist Party of America.

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