
Letter to the Secretariat and Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, May 25, 1922.

by L.E. Katterfeld

A document in the Comintern Archive: f. 515, op. 1, d. 93, ll. 46-47. Katterfeld signs as “J. Carr.”

To the Secretariat and
Members of the Presidium

Dear Comrades,

The state of affairs in the Party in the US makes it necessary to make a personal report.

1). The EC [Executive Committee] of the minority[†] that has remained outside of the Party has refused to submit to the decision of the EC of the Comintern. Officially, the comrades, like the leaders of the Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Lettish, and Lithuanian organizations, do all they can to keep their members outside of the Party. They foster in them the hope that the Fourth Congress of the Comintern will not confirm the decision of the Comintern, and that their fraction will be recognized as the Communist Party of America.

2). Among the members of the fraction there [is] a great desire to rejoin the Party and the International, and I am convinced that half of them, and perhaps three-quarters, will rejoin during the period allotted — that is by June 25th, they will have submitted to the decision of the EC.

3). Comrade Moore [George Ashkenudzie] is helping all he can, although his former comrades now call him “traitor,” etc. Comrade Marshall [Max Bedacht] on the other hand is not helping at all, for he would much prefer that none of the minority join the Party.

4). On the Executive [of the CPA] we have others who share his opinion. Cook [James Cannon], who has gone to the ECCI, prior to his departure proposed on the Executive that I should be reprimanded for having, with Moore, signed the declaration in Moscow and because I did not press hard enough against a fully empowered representative of the ECCI being sent to America. Cook was supported by Raphael [Alexander Bittelman], but I obtained the majority and my conduct in this matter was approved. The fact is, however, that the decision of the ECCI to bring the minority into the Party, when that will be found possible, is being sabotaged by both sides, avowedly by one and tacitly by the other. It will help matters if a fully empowered comrade were here.

5). There are other problems. I am astonished at the extent to which the idea of

[†]- In November 1921, a 3 member minority of the Central Executive Committee of the unified CPA — John Ballam, George Ashkenudzie, and Charles Dirba — lead a factional succession from the party on the basis of its movement towards establishing a legal political organization. Such a “Legal Political Party” was seen as an extreme security breach in the face of unrelenting state repression as well as an exercise in unprincipled opportunism by the members of the minority. The successionist minority, under the name Central Caucus, drew support from many of the party’s language federations — not accidentally the elements of the party most vulnerable to state repression. To a great extent this split was a replay of the CPA/CLP split, with the Central Caucus group hailing from the old CPA which the majority group of the unified CPA having roots in the old United Communist Party, which had sprung in turn from the even-older Communist Labor Party.

“liquidationism” has developed during my absence.† Few dare openly to advocate the liquidation of the Party, but all sorts of tactics are proposed which, if adopted would inevitably result in the destruction of the underground party. They wish to change the name of the legal Party and have it recognized as the American section of the Communist International. They say that the ECCI were not properly informed as to the position when the theses on the American position were drawn up, and proposed that new theses be adopted. Cook has something like this in his head, and so have Marshall, Wheat [Lovestone], and Raphael. Ballister [Robert Minor] stands with me for the theses that were signed last November by Kuusinen, Radek, and Bukharin. We do not yet know whether we have a majority against liquidation on the Party Executive, but we are quite sure that we shall obtain a majority at the forthcoming Party Conference, for the great majority of the Party membership is with us on this matter, and every member that comes to us from Moore’s fraction will willingly take his stand with us.

6). I ask that the ECCI make no alteration in its position on the American question prior to the 4th Congress [of the Comintern], even if comrade Cook propose that it should. He is the comrade who supported the liquidation theses, sent in by our Finnish organization Bureau. Perhaps comrade Kuusinen can explain the liquidation idea to him in the same way he did to comrade Holonen. On the basis of the theses we can really fight against the “leftism” of the minority, and the rapidly de-

veloping “right,” and at the forthcoming Party Congress we shall place the Communist Party of America firmly on the standpoint of the Comintern.

7). Another question that will be solved at the same time is the application of the “United Front” to the conditions in the US. The comrades who betray liquidation tendencies to my mind take up a wrong position on this question also. They appear to believe that the “United Front” inevitably means joint action with the old Socialist Party, the Farmer-Labor party, etc. at the next election. Comrade Marshall is drawing up one set of theses on this question and I another. On this question also, however, I have not the slightest doubt as to the verdict of the Party Conference, although Marshall has the majority on the present Executive.

8). Under these conditions I would once again ask the Presidium of the ECCI not to take up a new position on any question affecting America until it has received the report of the Party Conference. Various comrades will arrive in Moscow during the next two months with various points of view, but the Communist Party of America will not come to a final decision until the end of July. Until that time I shall willingly stay here for there is much work to do.

With fraternal greetings,

J. Carr [L.E. Katterfeld]
Member of the Presidium

†- This is an example of the way in which the “Liquidationist”/“Goose Caucus” fight was dissimilar to the Central Caucus split of the November 1921. Katterfeld was an important founding member of the Communist Labor Party, merging to form the United Communist Party. Yet on the issue of the whether the underground party should be altogether abolished, he “came over” to the perspective of the Central Caucus faction of Dirba, Ashkenudzie, and Ballam. One might conceive as Katterfeld and those sharing his view of this matter as a sort of “Center” group in the CPA, moving between the Right group of Cannon, Bittelman, Lovestone, and Weinstone and the Central Caucus on the Left.

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