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# Memorandum

## on the Present Situation in

### the Communist Movement of America:

#### Adopted by the Communist Unity Committee

#### for Submission to the Executive Committee

#### of the Third Communist International

#### [February 1, 1921]

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To the Executive Committee of  
the Third International.

Comrades:

1. The immediate cause for the formation of the Communist Unity Committee of America was the failure of the Central Committees of both existing Communist parties to carry out your last mandate for unity and create one united party. But the numerous membership of both parties that we represent and speak for, though unorganized and without expression, has been actively working in the Communist movement of America since its inception and has at all times been carrying on an energetic fight for Communist unity and for a living, representative, and realistic Communist party in America.

2. Our activities, therefore, date back to the very first days of our movement, when the foreign language organizations of the Socialist Party on the one hand and the revolutionary English-speaking elements of the same party on the other hand had begun to organize their forces under the banner of the Left Wing for the purpose of transforming the opportunistic and social-patriotic Socialist Party into a fighting organization of the class-conscious revolutionary workers of America.

3. But, as you well know, this attempt was met by the social-patriotic leadership of the Socialist Party

with an open declaration of war against the revolutionary elements of the party, resulting in the expulsion of a number of foreign language federations, with a membership of between 30 and 40,000.

4. The immediate effect of this act was, first, to quicken the activities of those revolutionary elements that still remained in the Socialist Party — mostly English-speaking — and, second, to throw a shadow of doubt into the ranks of the expelled federations as to the possibility of capturing the Socialist Party as a party for the International Communist Movement. This doubt has with time grown into a strong conviction on the part of the expelled federations that there was no possibility for capturing the Socialist Party machinery, that the great majority of the revolutionary membership of the party was already out of it (the expulsions of the above-mentioned federations was soon followed by a similar expulsion of two Socialist state organization of Massachusetts and Michigan), and finally, since the majority of the membership still within the party was either Right Wing or Centrist, it would be wrong tactics to try to get that membership into our movement. On the strength of these convictions, the expelled federations together with the Socialist groups from Michigan have begun to agitate for the immediate formation of a Communist Party of America.

5. For such a step, the English-speaking part of

the Left Wing as a whole was at that time clearly unprepared. The more advanced elements of that group were theoretically of the same opinion as the federations regarding the formation of a Communist Party of America. But naturally enough these advanced elements became very anxious, more so than the bulk of the federations, to get into the new Communist movement all the English-speaking membership of the Socialist Party that could possibly be persuaded to join. These advanced English-speaking elements of the Left Wing to their mind had a clearer and better conception of the value of the English-speaking revolutionary Socialists for the Communist movement of America than had the majority of the federations. For this reason the more advanced English-speaking elements of the Left Wing, though favoring the idea of creating a Communist Party, were fighting for the postponement of this step until the special convention of the Socialist Party should have been held.

6. In addition to this, it must be said, the question of who shall control the CP — the English-speaking groups or the federations — was an important factor in causing the division and later on the split between these two groups. The majority of the federations took the position from the very first that they — and they alone — can be entrusted with the building up and leadership of the Communist Party, while the advanced element of the English-speaking group maintained that they were in no wise inferior to the federations as regards the understanding of and devotion to the cause of international Communism. This fight for control had the effect of strengthening the determination of the federations to organize a Communist Party before the English-speaking elements shall have succeeded in better organizing their forces, and the stiffening of the federations' attitude has in its turn produced a more strenuous opposition on the part of the English-speaking elements of the Left Wing to the immediate formation of a Communist Party.

7. It must be noted right here that, as between the two elements composing the former Left Wing — the federations and the English-speaking group — the former were at the beginning the better prepared, intellectually and organizationally, for the immediate formation of a Communist Party in America. While the make-up of the federations was more or less homogeneous, its leadership in possession of a conscious

purpose, the English-speaking group was heterogeneous, disunited, with no organization comparable to that of the federations, and with a leadership reflecting all defects in the whole group.

8. The first National Conference of the Left Wing [New York: June 21-24, 1919] saw this division of opinion between the two component parts of our movement, on the question of when and how to organize a Communist Party in America develop into a bitter fight and finally into a split, with the following alignment of forces: the English-speaking elements of the Left Wing plus a minority of the federations on one side, and the majority of the federations plus the Michigan group on the other side. This Michigan group, representing our own variety of moderate academic Socialism with a revolutionary phraseology trimmed up-to-date, has had its own separate development and existence, and came into official organized contact with the Left Wing for the first time at the above-mentioned National Conference.

9. This split of the Left Wing at the National Conference we consider the cause of causes of all the troubles of our movement since then. The formation of two Communist Parties in September 1919 (CP and CLP); the split in the CP in April 1920, with the subsequent formation of the UCP; and finally the failure of both Central Committees to carry out your last mandate for unity — all these unfortunate facts are in full attributable to the first split in the ranks of the former Left Wing.

### **The CP and the CLP.**

10. The CP, as originally established in September 1919, was composed largely of the majority of the federations expelled from the Socialist Party, the Michigan group, and a very small number of English-speaking Left Wingers who, between the time of the split in the National Conference of the Left Wing and the date of formation of the CP have shifted over to the position of the federations and made common cause with them. For the short period of its legal existence (September 1919-January 1920) the CEC of the CP was busy facing and meeting the following two problems: First, the intensive campaign for unity conducted by the CLP since the day of its inception; and, second, the fight against the existence of federations conducted

by the English-speaking minority within the CP.

11. As to the question of unity with the CLP, the CEC of the CP had almost unanimously adopted the position that, since the CLP is by its composition, leadership, and program a centrist organization, no unity with the CLP as a party is possible. To this position the whole CEC has stuck up to the raids of January 1920, which have driven both parties underground. This last fact, together with the development of the fight within the CP on the question of federations, has brought about a change in the alignment of forces within the CEC of the CP on the proposition of unity. The English-speaking minority on the CEC of the CP that has been fighting for the abolition of federations, realizing that they were waging a losing battle, came around to the idea of uniting immediately both parties (merging the organization without convention was their plan), in order to get together all the English-speaking elements for a concerted fight against the existence of federations. Thus has the English-speaking minority on the CEC of the CP begun favoring — since January 1920 — an immediate merger with the CLP. But this was not all. Also within the majority of federation-men on the CEC of the CP, a minority has sprung up that began to look more favorably than the rest upon the proposition of unity with the CLP, not through immediate merger, but by means of a joint convention. This minority argued that since the raids, by driving the CLP underground, have purged its ranks of the centrist element that might have been there, the former objections to unity with the CLP were no longer valid. This view finally prevailed, and a resolution to this effect was passed unanimously by the CEC of the CP. It must be noted, however, that the majority of the federation-men on the CEC of the CP, though having voted in favor of a joint convention with the CLP, had not pledged themselves to abide by the decisions of the majority of that convention, but on the contrary had talked openly of the possibility and even desirability of a new split. This is the very group that is at present dominating the CP.

12. The former CLP was created primarily by the English-speaking elements of the Left Wing in conjunction with a small number of foreign language Socialists of the expelled federations. As already said, the CLP has begun immediately after its formation in September 1919 an intensive campaign for unity with

the CP by means of an immediate merger. But even in this campaign, that was ostensibly directed towards unity with the federations, the CLP has never failed to make a point of its opposition to the existence of federations and its desire to see them abolished. And if we add to this that the composition of the CLP was heterogeneous, that its program was far from being clear-cut and definite, and that most of its leaders had not yet emerged from the nebulous state of Socialist Left-Wingism — if we take all these facts into consideration, we shall have to conclude that the opposition of the CEC of the CP toward unity with the CLP through immediate merger, manifested between September 1919 and January 1920, had been justified.

13. During all this period there were present in both parties — CP and CLP — organized minorities, working toward a closer understanding between the two parts of the movement and striving to create suitable conditions for an organic unity between the two parties. The minorities were not organized, therefore their opinions found no expression in the official policies of the two parties. Nevertheless their influence upon the membership of both parties was at times very considerable. This was particularly the case in the months of March and April, 1920, when the unity negotiations between the CP and the CLP were on the eve of being brought to a successful conclusion, the situation in both parties was such that, had there been a joint convention at that time, the irreconcilable elements in both camps, the ones that have been responsible for all the senseless splits and troubles in our movement, would have gone down in disgraceful defeat, and a living united party would have been created.

14. But the ruling groups of both parties — the CP and CLP — willed differently. Realizing that a joint convention in April or May, 1920, might mean the final end of their misrule and sabotage, they had begun preparing for a new split. The result of these preparations was the split in the CP in April 1920, with the subsequent formation of the UCP. Thus have the hopes of the conscious Communists of the CP and the CLP for a united movement come to naught again.

### **The UCP and the CP.**

15. The one outstanding effect of that last split

(April 1920) was to make the schism in our movement deeper and the relations between the two new parties still more irreconcilable. Fortified by the so-called treachery of the English-speaking minority that left the CP to join with the CLP, the irreconcilables of the CP got into the saddle again, and have succeeded in silencing the minority in their party that still dared to talk about unity with the other party. The mere mention of the word unity was branded as centrism or treachery to the Communist movement. A resolution of this nature was passed by the convention of the CP held after the split [2nd: NYC: July 13-18, 1920].

16. On the other hand, the elements that left the CP to join with the CLP have strengthened the ranks of the irreconcilables of that party, thereby creating a solid anti-unity and anti-federation majority at the convention of both groups that formed the UCP [Bridgman, MI: May 26-31, 1920]. So there, also, the minority that sought an understanding with the CP on a basis acceptable to both sides was muzzled and suppressed. Never was the proposition of unity as far removed from the realm of practical possibilities as in the first 3 months (May, June, and July, 1920) following the last split in the CP. The ruling groups in both parties, in order to make their respective positions secure, have been trying to establish such forms of organization and practices of discipline as to strangulate every living activity in their parties. The CEC of the CP has adopted a policy of isolation from the real work of the American class struggle, shunning every living issue that might bring it in contact with the mass movement of the American working class, imitating in fact all the worst features of the decayed and petrified Socialist Labor Party of America. The only thing the CEC of the CP has been doing thoroughly and conscientiously since May 1920 was to instill into the ranks of the party bitter feelings of resentment and hostility against the UCP, and killing unscrupulously every opposition of its minorities.

17. The CEC of the UCP, the one that has started its activities with the promising statement that it was going to make the UCP a real factor in the mass movement of the American workers, has in practice done to the ideas of Communism in America more harm than had the CEC of the CP. In the first place, the CEC of the UCP has begun bargaining with the

present leadership of the IWW for cooperation, and in doing this it promised support which it was beyond its powers to give, and was willing to assume obligations that go contrary to the decisions of the Third International and to the best interests of the Communist movement in America, as for instance, to support the IWW as against the AF of L. By practicing such tactics the CEC of the UCP has succeeded in alienating from Communism the revolutionary workers of the IWW, and in completely discrediting itself in the eyes of the less-conscious elements of the AF of L. The first approach of the CEC of the UCP toward the mass movement of the American workers, made as it was in the spirit and with the methods of old-time opportunism and political trickery, has left a bad aftertaste in the mouths of all concerned.

18. Within its own party, the CEC of the UCP has been working on the theory that all evils come from the foreign language groups. In harmony with the monstrous view it has begun, right after the formation of the UCP, a campaign of destruction against the remnants of federationism in its party that has by now all but completely ruined the communist organization of its foreign language membership, pitting one group against the other, constantly holding the whip of expulsion over the heads of the minority that has been trying — legally and within the proper bounds of party discipline — to halt this process of destruction and suicide.

19. If the ruling groups of both parties could be credited with having any clear and honest conceptions of the nature and purpose of a Communist Party, these conceptions might be stated as follows:

The ruling group of the CP conceives of the party as of a group of Communists, sitting underground, isolated for the present from the whole living world, and keeping themselves in readiness for the arrival of the Social Revolution. Between today and the time of revolution there is nothing to be done except publishing a few papers, once in a while a leaflet or pamphlet, and to every issue facing the workers of America respond in chorus: Down with Capitalism and Hail the Insurrection! Above all, the membership of the party must do as little thinking for itself as it can possibly manage, and blindly follow the decisions of the present Central Committee by the CP. No dissensions: no — not even before conventions — discussions; minori-

ties must keep their mouths shut or else get out of the party.

The ruling group of the UCP conceives of a Communist Party as a group of Communists, sitting underground or above ground, it does not matter which; publishing a lot of papers in many languages without regard to their form or contents; and mixing indiscriminately all over, no matter with whom or how. Their motto is: The more noise the better! Above all, the Communist organizations of the foreign language groups must be destroyed root and branch. As to the relations between the membership and the CEC, the "leaders" of the UCP hold precisely the same view and practice exactly the same tactics as the "leaders" of the CP.

### **Your Last Mandate for Unity.**

20. You will have probably learned by this time that your last mandate for unity was broken. We hope you will not be deceived by the excuses and explanations that will be offered to you by the Central Committees of both parties as to the real causes of this last failure. We, the conscious membership of both parties, know full well that your last mandate for unity was received with consternation by the leading groups of both parties. At first they were struck as if by thunder from a clear sky. Each of the two has been hoping all along to get your recognition for itself and expulsion for the other party. This is what they kept on telling to the membership since May 1920. But having realized pretty quickly that the Third International means business this time, they began playing a game of "hide and seek," pretending to be negotiating for unity, and all the time seeking to keep clean their respective unity-records before you and their membership. Which of the two Central Committees is more guilty in breaking your mandate and frustrating our own desire for unity, is an irrelevant question. The outstanding facts, the ones that really matter, are these: that the people at present governing the two parties are the very same men that have been fighting each other on the question of control ever since the inception of the Left Wing, that is, from the very first days of our movement; that in this mutual struggle, lasting, as it does nearly 2 years, the "leaders" of both parties have become so hostile and embittered toward each

other that they cannot even muster sufficient reserve to deal with one another as members of the Communist International; that the "leaders" of both parties, having come into control of their respective camps on a platform of irreconcilability and a fight to the finish, they cannot possibly recede from their traditional positions and compromise in any way whatsoever without weakening their hold upon their own followers and losing every vestige of influence even among their own men. This — both ruling groups realize. Consequently, the only way these ruling groups could possibly meet your mandate for unity was to pretend negotiating unity so as not to challenge openly your authority, while in reality they were consciously piling up numbers of new obstacles in the way of this very same unity. Viewing the whole affair objectively, unity at this time, with these groups in control of the machinery of both parties, was an utter impossibility. And so it turned out to be. And just because we have come to realize these facts and appraise their real value that we have decided to form the Communist Unity Committee of America.

### **The Communist Unity Committee.**

Our committee was formed by active members of both parties. It consists of and is being supported by precisely the same elements in the two parties that have been struggling for unity ever since the inception of the Left Wing. Long before the formation of this committee took place, we have been fighting — each group in its own party — for the idea that the Communist movement of America must seek to bring together the English-speaking and foreign language Communists into one party; that this is the first condition for our existence and future activities. As to the questions of federations, we took the position that the foreign language groups must remain in existence, that their activities must be centralized and supervised by National Propaganda Committees elected at National Conventions of each language group; that the autonomy of these National Propaganda Committees be limited strictly to matters of propaganda and organization; and that the final control and supervision over the National Propaganda Committees be lodged with the Central Committee of the Party. This solution of the problem, while insuring the proper and successful

conduct of communist propaganda among the foreign language workers, in no way impairs or weakens the principle of centralization. For the leading body for each party unity still remains the *general party organization*. For the city: the City Committee elected by the representative party-workers of that city, irrespective of their language group affiliations. For the district: the District Committee elected by the representative party-workers of that district, again irrespective of their language group affiliation. And as to the country, there is the Central Committee of the Party made up by delegates not from National Propaganda Committees, but elected at a general convention of delegates from *general* party organizations, and only to such conventions responsible. That a party consisting of large numbers of foreign language-speaking communists will have at its conventions and its CEC an appreciable number of foreign language delegates or members is perfectly natural. And if there should be any valid objection to such a state of affairs, it can be removed only by spreading the activities of the communist movement into the ranks of the English-speaking workers, but certainly not by destroying the communist organization of the foreign language workers, as the "leaders" of the UCP are trying to do.

22. These were the views of the federation problem that we have been trying to spread to each group in its own party. For this we were branded by the ruling group of the CP as traitors to federation, and by the ruling group of the UCP as dangerous federationists. Every attempt of ours to bring these problems into open discussion *through the regular party channels* were met by the ruling groups of both parties with ostracism and expulsion. And since there were no other channels for reaching the membership, these crucial problems of our movement were practically never discussed.

23. As a general rule, no party problem even such as were still awaiting solution, were ever discussed in the press of the two parties. No criticism of past deeds was ever allowed. These being the practices of organization prevailing in both parties, none of us — whether of the CP or UCP — had any chance of challenging the wisdom (not the authority) of the Central Committee through the regular party channels. Thus have we been compelled to adopt the irregular way by creating the Communist Unity Committee.

24. The ruling groups of both parties will have to make up their minds to tolerate our existence. We shall purposely keep the names of our members a secret — except of those already expelled — so as not to "tempt" the Central Committees to commit the folly of expulsion. They will have to take us in good grace, and if they care at all to meet our criticisms, they will have to learn and practice the art of *discussion and persuasion*.

25. On the assumption that this will be the attitude of the ruling groups toward our movement for one Communist Party, we shall limit ourselves to creating opinion only. We shall attempt to take up and discuss all the problems involved in the creation of one united party, so that when in the future joint convention of newly elected delegates of both parties finally takes place, the intellectual ground will be cleared for starting the united party as a living and active factor in the class struggle of the American working class.

### **Unity and the Present Situation in the US.**

26. The question of Unity is to our minds inseparable from the broader problems concerning the tasks of the Communist movement of America in the present situation. This situation could be described as follows: There is a deep-seated and broadcast feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest manifesting itself among the laboring masses of our country. City worker, farm laborer, tenant farmer, and poor farmer — proprietor — all are suffering from the effects of the imperialist war and the present financial crisis. The most noteworthy and, in point of time, novel phenomenon of our economic and political life is the rapid social differentiation among the farming population of America; the tenant-farmers and the poor farmers — proprietors liberating themselves from the political tutelage of the farming-capitalist and banker. The second fact worth noting is the anti-union campaign — so-called Open Shop — started by a powerful combination of bankers and industrial magnates for the purpose of destroying or making impotent the labor organizations of the United States. Great struggles between the oppressed masses and the imperialist oppressors are impending.

27. On this general background there appear two

very important factors. First, a growing sympathy for Soviet Russia and the Soviet idea in general among the broad masses; and, second, the rapid conversion of the revolutionary workers of America toward the ideas and tactical methods of communism and toward recognition of the leadership of the Third International.

28. A Communist Party of America worth its name should have succeeded already in creating — if not actually leading — a strong mass movement for the recognition of Soviet Russia. It should have succeeded in getting all the Communists of America into the ranks and making them function as effective communist oppositions in the various labor and farmer organizations of America. And, of course, such a party would have been the party, the single Communist Party of America.

29. But, as is seen from the above, the ruling groups of both parties have neither the conception nor the ability to build and lead such a party. If ever this united party ever emerges from the present factional struggle in our movement, it will not come through the rulers of the two parties, but rather in spite of them. To put the Executive Committee of the Third International in possession of all these facts and to explain their significance in the light of our experience is the aim and purpose of the Communist Unity Committee.

***Edited by Tim Davenport.***

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