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# Make It a Party of Action!

## A Declaration of the Central Executive Committee to the Membership. [circa November 1921] †

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The Central Executive calls to the attention of the membership the following important declaration of the Communist International regarding the task of the Party as contained in the Thesis of the Third Congress [June 22-Aug. 12, 1921]:

“In the United States of North America where, on account of historical circumstances, there was lacking any broad revolutionary movement even before the war, *the Communists are still before the first and simplest task of creating a nucleus and connecting it with the working masses.* The present economic crisis, which has thrown five million people out of work, affords a very favorable soil for this kind of work. Conscious of the imminent danger of a radicalized labor movement and its becoming subject to Communist influence, American capital tries to crush and destroy the young Communist movement by means of barbarous persecution, forcing it into an illegalized existence under which it would according to capitalist expectations, in the absence of any contact with the masses, dwindle into a propagandist sect and lose its vitality. *The Communist International draws the attention of the Communist Party (unified) to the fact that the illegalized organization must not only form the ground for the collection and crystallization of active Communist forces, but that it is their duty to try all ways and means to get out of their illegalized condition into the open, among the wide masses; that it is their further duty to find the means and form to unite these masses politically into a struggle against American capitalism.*”

### **The Task of the Party.**

The Communist Party of America is established for the purpose of organizing united action of the proletariat for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Its task

consists in drawing the workers of America into a struggle with capitalism through close association with the masses in all their struggles and by diligent participation in all forms of activity gain leadership and win them over to the principles of Communism.

The Communist Party is now in its third year of existence. It has as yet hardly gained a foothold among the broad masses. This was due to the circumstances under which it originated and developed. The Communist Party of America did not originate out of the actual development of the class struggle in America. It was mainly a reflex of the Russian Revolution and reaction to the opportunism of the Socialist Party — a party that had never taken root among the workers. On account of the traditional policy of isolation of the militant elements and the sectarian spirit and political inexperience of the Left Wing, the movement pursued the policy of segregating itself from the masses. This tendency was further emphasized by the assault of the government, which resulted in the breakup of the open organization and the formation of the underground party. Today “we are still before the first and simplest task of creating a communist nucleus and connecting it with the working masses.”

In this work, the Party faces a task far greater and more difficult than that confronting the Communist Parties of Europe. In Europe practically all the workers recognize the class struggle. They have developed great political movements and class organizations. The militant elements have been in constant touch

†- While the authorship of this leaflet is undetermined, it bears notice that the Ruthenberg minority group of the old CPA produced an agitational leaflet with almost the exact same title at the end of April 1920: “Make It A Party of Action’: To the Members of the Communist Party.” (Copy in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 34, ll. 20-21). As Ruthenberg was in prison at the time the present leaflet was published, leading candidate for authorship would seem to be his compatriot in the April 1920 split, Jay Lovestone.

with the masses and acquired leadership and experience. In the United States, however, the workers are not class conscious. The Party is compelled to carry on its work among them, facing the additional difficulty of having to fight the blackest reactionaries in the world. At the same time the class-conscious elements are diseased with sectarianism and suffering from inexperience.

*The CEC realizes that the Party cannot perform its task without developing the proper methods and forms of organization.* With the apparatus of the illegal organization ALONE the task would be hopeless. It is necessary to build a machinery that can make the fullest use of all legal possibilities. The Communist International has declared that it strives for “great revolutionary mass parties and that it rejects the idea of the formation of small Communist sects, which cannot attain influence upon the working masses.” It calls upon the “Communist Parties not to confine themselves to propaganda but to utilize every possibility which bourgeois society is compelled to leave open for agitation and organization of the proletariat.”

In response to this need the CEC set up a legal political organization which would centralize the legal activities of the Party. The CEC was later instructed by a mandate of the Communist International to take further steps in its legal activities and to establish a legal political organization with an active membership, capable of participating in all the phases of the class struggle (industrial, parliamentary, etc.). It is proceeding to execute the mandate and calls upon the membership to give its loyal support in this work.

### **The Opposition to the Mandate of the Communist International.**

There has appeared an opposition to the plans of the CEC in the execution of the mandate. This opposition to the establishment of the political organization is of the same sectarian character as presented itself in the movement every time the Communist parties attempted to carry out the policies of the Communist International. Both in the content of their criticism and in their methods, they show themselves incapable of understanding or applying the tactics of the Communist International.

### **Legal Work and Legal Political Organization.**

Objection has been raised by these sectarian elements against the plans of the CEC, on the ground that to do legal work it is not necessary to set up a legal political organization. This is quite true. To do legal work one may set up fraternal organizations, sick and benefit societies, or educational clubs. But these instruments are entirely unfit to make organic contact with the masses. The problem is not legal work, *but the full utilization of all legal possibilities for uniting the masses politically.* Any other conception of legal work which does not meet these requirements is a perversion of the role of the Party in the class struggle and is in direct opposition to the mandate of the CI. To build up a conglomeration of legal organizations, which do not give political character to the struggle, and which further disunite and confuse the masses, is an evasion of the needs of the movement.

The objection to the plans of the CEC on the ground of “liquidation” is also based upon a failure to comprehend the Communist task in the class struggle. The underground organization is not liquidated. It takes on the character which in the extension of the legal activities it has already been assuming. The underground organization becomes the controlling and directing body. It will comprise and recruit only the most conscious, clear-sighted, and aggressive elements. The legal organization will form then a recruiting center for the underground, adding new blood to the latter and stimulating its growth.

Every objection to the establishment of a legal political organization because of fear that the Communists will be swallowed up in the legal organization is an outcome of the same incapacity to grasp the living needs of the movement which manifested itself in the opposition of the same sectarian elements to participation in the reactionary unions on the ground that the Communists would be lost in the reactionary machine.

The CEC is determined to make the Communist Party — a party of action. It calls upon the membership loyally to support the policies of the Communist International. “*GO TO THE MASSES*” is the battle cry which the Third Congress issued to all Communists in all countries. The CEC translates this dynamic

slogan for America “Build up the apparatus to go to the masses and prepare to become the advance guard!”

### **The Situation in the Party.**

The CEC took over a party saturated with factionalism and the spirit of clique formation. The amalgamation of the two parties did not fully liquidate this condition. The CEC has had to order the suspension, pending investigation, of 19 members who refused to recognize its authority, flagrantly violated its instructions, and threatened its representatives with violence.

Within the Party at present there are a number of members who breed dissension, violation of discipline, and demoralization. This element attempts to capitalize former factional divisions for their own factional interests. Not on concrete issues facing the Party, but on slanderous accusations of factional control; insinuations calculated to stir up former factional lines, do they attempt to maintain their petty personal spheres of influence, and continue to break down the discipline of the Party.

The disruption now going on in the Party is part of a concentrated plan to undermine the discipline of the organization and prevent the CEC from carrying out the mandate of the Communist International. The CEC has come into position of a letter sent out to some members and units by the former EC of the Russian Federation. This letter follows:

“In general affairs are as follows:

We are at the present time in such a condition as some time ago Nikolai Nikolaivich was in the Carpathian Mountains. At the beginning our five in the CEC [i.e. the 5 former members of the old CPA] advanced courageously very far. It would have gone further if not for the treachery of one of our members [J. Wilenkin]. Now we have to retreat without powder and without herring. *Today was held the first meeting of the federation caucus, Russian, Lettish [Latvian], Lithuanian, and Ukrainian Federations. We have elected a committee to work out a plan of action. The caucus decided to refrain from any action until there will be worked out a general plan for common action.*”

This letter was sent out six weeks ago. The spirit of the letter betrays a complete disregard for party welfare. It is “we” and “our five” and “treachery” to their former faction. They have since worked out a plan for common action — a plan to disrupt the Party, strangle it, and break down the authority of the CEC.

The comrades are urged to watch the developments of this dastardly attempt to undermine the young Communist movement in order to maintain their factional control. The CEC feels sure that the membership of those federations will repudiate the actions of these former committee members and will stand by the Party.

The insinuations that the majority of the CEC is pursuing a “crushing” policy toward former CP members are dishonest. The majority of the CEC is composed of CP and UCP members. It is an alignment on the basis of policies, the policy of legal activities and the mandate of the CI. In respect to these policies, the CEC recognizes no divisions nor former lines. It knows only party members and the policies of the Communist International.

### **Party Discipline.**

Every member knows that without a solid, united, and well disciplined party, victory over capitalism is impossible. Without unqualified centralization and the strictest discipline the Party is unable to respond to the needs of the class struggle and organize the proletariat for the destruction of the powerful capitalist state. The discipline of the proletarian party must be firm. It is the power that fuses the Party and makes it an effective fighting force. Discipline means a willingness to submit to the decisions of the Party. It means above all submission to the decisions of the highest authority between conventions — the CEC. To maintain discipline and carry out its decisions, the CEC must have full control of the party machinery. It is therefore invested by the constitution with power of appointing its officers. Where these do not execute its decisions, either through incompetence, lack of confidence of the membership, or petty intrigue, the CEC is compelled to remove them. The CEC has therefore removed the Organizer of District 1 [Boston], because he could not hold the confidence or the cooperation of the membership, as manifested by a resolution of the District Convention requesting his removal; and the Organizer of District 4 [Cleveland], who was neither competent nor industrious in his work. The membership of these districts have fully supported the actions of the CEC.

### The Lithuanian Bureau.

Regarding the language bureaus, the CEC holds that they are similar to other units. They are a necessary mechanism to unite our forces for more effective work among the nationalities of this country. Like any other party mechanism, however, they are useful to the Party as long as they function in accordance with the plans, purposes, and decisions of the CEC. Recognizing this fact, the Unity Convention [May 15-28, 1921] placed in the hands of the CEC powers sufficient to settle any doubt as to the relation of the bureaus to the CEC. It invested the latter with power of approval or disapproval of members elected to the bureaus, as well as full control over all its activities. Upon evidence that members of a bureau are instrumental in obstructing the policies of the CEC and the Party, it is the duty of the CEC to either disapprove, remove, or reorganize such bureaus.

In the case of the Lithuanian Bureau, the majority of those elected were sponsor for an article which appeared in the official organ of the Federation for which the Editor was removed by the CEC. This article *"tends to incite one federation against another, aims to perpetuate the mutual suspicions of the former UCP and CP, and supports the policy of splitting as a means of settling supposed differences of principles, overlooking the existence of the Communist International."* The CEC disapproved of the article as violating party discipline and abusing the office of editor and the vote to remove cut across former factional lines. The majority of the members of the former Lithuanian Bureau, elected to the new Bureau, reaffirmed their support of the editor, refused to print the statement of the CEC in the official organ, and showed such defiance and hostility as to warrant the reorganization of the Bureau. The members of the Lithuanian Federation have received perverted stories of the causes of the removal of the editor. Malicious lies have been spread to prejudice the members of this Federation against the CEC. The CEC declares such activities will not be permitted to continue. The defence of factional interests cannot be made at the expense of the consolidation and growth of the Party.

### There is Work to Be Done.

The amalgamation of the two parties delayed and made difficult by the old factional divisions of the CEC and the Party is now being completed. The districts, excepting the newly created, have their apparatus in working order.† The majority of language bureaus are already constituted and functioning. Shortly the new apparatus of the united party will complete its organization and the Party dedicate itself with renewed energy to the real struggle against capitalism.

The machinery set up by the Industrial Department of the CEC for work in labor unions and industrial struggles is gradually drawing the entire membership into its work. In time every member and sympathizer will be organized for effective work in unions, shops, mills, and mines. More and more as the Party becomes a party of action, the full attention will be concentrated in this direction. The Party is guided in this work by the needs and interests in the various fields of the class struggle. The nuclei and sympathizers are being connected with each other locally as well as nationally as rapidly as the membership itself responds.

The press, the most important expression of the Party, is assuming evermore the character of organs of the class struggle. There is much work to be done in this field. The policy of making the press respond to the needs of the workers in the class struggle of this country and on the basis of the everyday events give guidance and unification to the workers, cannot be realized at once. The language press is being reorganized in accordance with this policy. The illegal organs are now appearing more regularly. Here, too, the policy pursued is to make them interpreters of the class struggle in America, so that the Party may correctly formulate its tactics and slogans. The results of the work being done in the press will be seen in time.

The legal and parliamentary activities have been the weakest part of the Party's life. Our legal machinery is engaged mainly in relief work for Soviet Russia and notable successes are reported in many cities. The participation of the Party in the parliamentary campaigns in some cities is progressing satisfactorily. The experience gained in this work will be of considerable value in the future.

†- New Districts 10 [Buffalo], 11 [Pittsburgh], and 12 [Minneapolis] were established in the Fall of 1921.

The educational activities are being seriously hampered by the state of affairs in the Party. Education is the first to suffer from financial stringency or party disability. Classes in the fundamentals of Communism are in process of formation. The tactics of the Third Congress will be ready for group study as soon as finances permit. The legal educational activities await funds and the extension of the legal work for development.

Propaganda among the Negroes and the Irish, which was begun with great determination and had been bearing fruit, has had to slow down for want of funds. The Negroes, the most oppressed and exploited people in this country, afford a fertile field for Communist propaganda. The Irish, awakened by the acute struggle in Ireland, also offer fine opportunity for propaganda and organization.

The unemployment situation is becoming evermore acute. This problem is the test of the Party's strength and program. The unemployment situation is becoming evermore acute. The unemployment situation cannot be solved by the efforts or lack of efforts of capitalism. The CEC has plans under consideration to concentrate upon unemployment with a view of organizing the unemployed masses into a mass movement against capitalism. The policies of the Party on this question will appear in the official organ.

Arrangements are being made to make better contact with the subdivisions and membership. The CEC will hold conferences with the language bureaus to direct their activities better. Conferences with active members in the various districts and subdistricts

will be held periodically to familiarize them with the policies of the CEC. Lecturers are being routed through the subdivisions to acquaint the members with the decisions of the Third Congress and the Red Trade Union International.

### **Make It a Party of Action.**

The Central Executive Committee is determined to make the CP a party of action. It is bending its energies to develop a fighting force in constant contact with the masses. In this task it is hampered by the shameful slanders and destructive activities of an element for whom the movement is an arena for petty factionalism; an element suffering acute sectarianism and leftism.

It has come to the attention of the CEC that funds from the manifold activities of the Party are being withheld by officials opposing the policies of the CEC. In other places there is organized effort to slow down the activities in order to undermine the discipline of the Party and weaken the authority of the CEC. The CEC declares that it will stop these destructive activities by decisive action. It will brook no disruption of the Party. The day for disruption is over! We must build a united and invincible front! We must build a party of revolutionary action!

Comrades! Let us purge our ranks of that baneful factionalism which has so discredited the Party in the eyes of the International. Let us build a party of action! On with the Communist struggle!

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.*

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