
Circular Letter to All Branches and Locals of the Communist Party of America from C.E. Ruthenberg, Executive Secretary, October 7, 1919.

Typeset single sheet, copy in Davenport collection.

Oct. 7, 1919.

To All Branches and Locals:

Every true Communist is vitally concerned to achieve the unity of all the workers who are Communist in principle. The Communist Party yields to no other organization in its desire to bring together in one organization every man or woman in the country who agrees that it is through an organization founded upon Communistic principles that the freedom of the workers can alone be won. Because its attitude on this question is being misrepresented this statement is made.

In order to fully understand the developments at Chicago, it is necessary to review the situation which existed before the convention took place.

It was well understood by the former members and members of the Socialist Party that two conventions would be held. It was definitely known that an Emergency Convention of the Socialist party would be held and also that there would be a convention to organize the Communist Party.

How many party members knew that there would be a third convention? What branches or state organizations had instructed their delegates to enter a third convention and organize a third party? We feel secure in the statement that not a single local or state organization knew of a third convention to be held in Chicago and none had instructed their delegates to organize a third party.

The leaders of the Communist Labor Party are saying that they knew in advance that such a convention would be held. Although nine-tenths of the mem-

bership and of the delegates to the Left Wing Conference were in the Communist Convention the leaders of the Communist Labor Party are trying to justify their action in organizing a third party, and thus breaking Communist unity, by the argument that the decisions of the Left Wing Conference called for a third convention, and, logically, for a third party. No membership had such a conception before the Chicago convention. The leaders who are now making this argument did not dare tell even the membership that sent them to Chicago that they had such an understanding and were going to Chicago to organize a third party.

These same leaders showed from the very beginning in Chicago that they were playing for a third party. When the group calling itself the Left Wing of the Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party met in caucus on Friday night before the opening of the Emergency Convention [Aug. 29, 1919] a resolution was presented by C.E. Ruthenberg binding them to enter the Communist Convention immediately after they bolted from the Emergency Convention. It was voted down. After the bolt had taken place C.E. Ruthenberg again offered a resolution making the first order of business the question of unity with the Communist Convention. Again the resolution was voted down. It was only after the bolters had declared themselves first the legal Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party (after being thrown out of the "legal" convention by the police! Does such childishness belong in a party calling itself "Communist?") and second, "the party of Communist-Socialism" that they were willing to consider the question of unity with the Communist Convention.

This record shows clearly that it was these bolt-

ers who are responsible for the existence of the third party, for, if they wanted unity, why did they first create stumbling blocks in the way or unity by first organizing a party and then trying to make a deal as a party? If they are Communists, why did they not, after leaving the Socialist Party Emergency Convention, go to the Communist Convention and ask to be seated as delegates? Why all this rigmarole about being the “legal Emergency Convention” and the “party of communist-Socialism,” if not to prevent unity?

The Communist Convention stood strictly on principle in dealing with these adherents of the “legal Emergency Convention.” The Communist Convention was not a chance affair. It was the organized expression of the will of more than 50,000 former members of the Socialist Party. These members had endorsed the Joint Call of the National Left Wing Council and the Organizing Committee of the Communist Party for this convention. They had sent delegates on the basis of the Joint Call. The credentials of every delegate had been passed upon by the Credentials Committee of the Convention. The Communist Convention in its dealing with the bolting delegates said in effect: We will admit you to our convention on the same basis that every other delegate has been admitted. Present your credentials to our Credentials Committee as we have done.

Previously the Organizing Committee and the Left Wing Council had declared to these delegates that all those delegates who had credentials for both the Emergency Convention and the Communist Convention would be included in the roster of delegates that would organize the convention, and the spirit of the convention toward the other bolting delegates was shown in the seating without question of 4 delegates from Minnesota because their State Organization had endorsed the Left Wing Program, although they had no definite credentials for the Communist Convention.

But the bolting delegates who organized the communist Labor Party refused to come into the Communist Convention on the same basis as all other delegates. They insisted on being accepted as a party “on the basis of equality.” They said, in effect, you must swallow us all or none of us will come.”

It was that attitude which prevented unity. The Communist Convention was ready to seat all the del-

egates who were Communists in principle. It would have refused to seat those who, like [Fred] Harwood of New Jersey, took the position “I have never been a member of the Left Wing and am not in sympathy with the Left Wing.” It would have refused to seat those in the Communist Labor Party convention, who, like [Edwin] Firth of West Virginia and Minnie Rivkin or Ohio, had not been elected by any membership to sit in any convention, but had been seated by the Communist Labor Convention because they happened to be there and they wanted to be nice to them and maybe to make a showing of delegates!

Not all the bolting delegates had left the Socialist Party Convention because they were Communists. Some had left because they did not like the fact that the Socialist Party officials had used the police to guard their convention; some because they didn't like the methods of these same officials; some because they were centrists, in disagreement with the Socialist Party attitude on principle. These differences became apparent when a number of delegates bolted the Communist Labor Party Convention for home and when, after electing an Executive Committee the matter had to be reconsidered and other members elected, because two elected on the first ballot were not considered “clear.” Could the Communist Party — a party of strict adherence to principle — have swallowed this organization as a body “on the basis of equality” (whatever that may mean!) and remain true to its principles? We leave it to the membership to judge.

The Communist Party represents the solid strength of the Communists of the United States. Fifty thousand members were represented in its convention and are now being welded together in a strong organization. The Communist Labor Party, in comparison, was not a membership expression. The party was organized by delegates without instructions for such action. It presents a great show of states: Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Nebraska, Utah, and Virginia among them, all of which together haven't as many members as one large local in some industrial centre! But even if the membership endorse the action of the delegates, which is doubtful, it will not have more than 15,000 members. Which organization offers the workers of the United States the opportunity to build an organization that will be a strong weapon in their struggle for emancipation?

Communist Unity is still possible. The delegates of the Communist Labor Convention are responsible for the organization of a third party. If they are Communists in principle let them step aside. If they desire unity of the Communist elements in the United States, let them disband their Executive Committee and urge every local to join the Communist Party.

The Communist Party has opened the doors wide for the unity of all those who are united for Communist principles by providing in its constitution that "Any branch of the Socialist Party or of the Socialist Labor Party which endorses the Program and Constitution of the Communist Party and applies for a charter before Jan. 1, 1920, shall be accepted as a branch."

What is there that stands in the way of the leaders of the Communist Labor Party accepting this invitation? Is it a desire for leadership? Another convention of the Communist Party takes place in 8 months. Cannot they make the sacrifice of waiting that long? They have the opportunity to secure leadership then, if they convince a majority of the membership that they should hold such positions.

The Communist Party makes no general appeal to everybody to join the Communist Party. It does appeal to all the individuals, branches, and locals that are ready to accept the principles set forth in its program and constitution. It appeals to such individuals and organizations not to be misled, but to join the Communist Party and thus make possible the only unity worth having, the unity of those united for Communist principles.

Fraternally yours,

C.E. Ruthenberg
Executive Secretary.

THESE HAVE JOINED THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Local Philadelphia with 2,500 members in good standing.

Local Greater New York with close to 5,000 members.

Local Cleveland with 2,500 members all in good standing.

The entire state organization of Massachusetts.

The entire state organization of Michigan.

The Left Wing state organization of Connecticut.

The Left Wing state organization of New Jersey.

Milwaukee City Central Committee with a big membership.

Baltimore City Central Committee.

Erie, Pa. City Central Committee.

Buffalo, NY.

Rochester, NY.

Cook County Central Committee with over 5,000 members.

Many smaller locals all over the United States.

The Russian Communist Federation.

The Lithuanian Communist Federation.

The South Slavic Communist Federation.

The Polish Communist Federation.

The Lettish [Latvian] Communist Federation.

The Ukrainian Communist Federation.

A German Communist Federation is being organized with branches at St. Paul, Minn., Cleveland, Vincennes, Ind., Erie, Pa., 2 branches in New Jersey and 5 branches in Greater New York, and the German Branch of St. Louis as the nucleus.

The first Italian branch has been chartered at Beloit, Wis., and another branch is being organized in Pennsylvania.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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