
To the Foreign Committee of the American Communist Party and the American Communist Labor Party.

A Confidential Letter from the Executive Committee of the
Communist International, circa December 1919.†

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CONFIDENTIAL.

COMRADES,

We have received more or less exact information concerning your differences. A split in the Communist Party — in such a young organization as yours, at the present time, and in a country like America, where wide prospects and wide possibilities are open to the Communist movement — a split is impossible and unthinkable...

Both parties must immediately take firm steps towards amalgamation.

The information which we have received from a reliable and unbiased source bears out that you have no differences *on questions of program*. We know that both parties base their program on the program of the Russian Communist Party and on the Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. There can only be differences on points of detail, unforeseen in the program of the Russian Communist Party or the Constitu-

tion of the RSFSR, such as making use of legal means (parliamentarism), or questions of the relations to the Trade Union Labor organizations. The Executive Committee of the Communist International, however, has quite definitely and clearly formulated its opinion on these two questions, and the resolution of the Executive Committee of the Communist International on these points should serve as a basis for uniting the programs and the activities of both parties.

According to our information, however, the chief points of difference appear to be not questions of program, but questions of tactics and organization confined mainly to two points: (1) on the type, character, and structure of communist organizations; (2) activity of the Soviet Embassy, i.e. on the relations between the Communist organizations and the representatives of the Soviet Authority.

With regard to the first point the Executive Committee of the Communist International, while recognizing the necessity of creating a strong communist nucleus composed of thoroughly class-

†- This letter is difficult to date with precision. The Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party of America were both established during the first week of September 1919. The CPA is known to have made its particular application for membership in the Comintern with a letter by Louis C. Fraina dated Nov. 11, 1919. Assuming that Fraina's application predated this document and allowing some time for its transmission, a date of December 1919 for the present document would seem to be approximately correct. The unrecognized Soviet Embassy mentioned in this document, the "Russian Soviet Government Bureau" headed by Ludwig A. Martens, faced New York state and federal government persecution throughout the fall of 1919. The Bureau was terminated and Martens deported in January 1920. All ellipses in this document appear in the original.

conscious proletarians, that is, “communists in the full sense of the word,” we, nevertheless, recognize the necessity of attracting the broad masses of the proletariat and semi-proletariat to the communist movement. Do not isolate yourselves from the masses, but go among the masses toward communism. The most important thing of all is agitation and propaganda. The doors of the party should be open wide for the proletariat. Let the proletariat learn the meaning of communism from within the ranks of the party; let the Communist Party be the communist school for the masses.

We have to construct a mass party, and not an isolated group, above all it is necessary that the party should be an active force and not a narrow academic group which, although preserving communism in its immaculate purity, nevertheless fails to play that great part in the political struggle. In short, our party must above all be a PARTY.

We know that the Central Committee of the American Communist Party emphasizes the necessity “to separate itself from non-communist elements,” from which it appears that this “separateness” is regarded not from the point of view of separating from certain social democratic or so-called “center” elements, but from the point of view of complete isolation... Such separateness leads to unnecessary splits, to unnecessary and harmful division of forces, and finally leads to the possibility of our organization finding itself outside the political and public life.

We think that the following point of view should apply to the second question:

The Soviet Ambassador [Ludwig A. Martens] is responsible only to the Soviet Authorities, to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets which appointed him to his post. There

can be no question of his responsibility to any American organization even if it is largely or even exclusively composed of citizens of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic. There can be no question of subjecting the Soviet Ambassador to the control of the American Communist Party or to a Russian section of that party. Complete unanimity between the Soviet Ambassador and the Russian Communist organization on general politics is desirable; it is desirable likewise that friendly relations should exist between the American Communist organizations and the Soviet Ambassador, but we repeat that there can be no question of control.

The Soviet Ambassador as representative of the Soviet Government and not of the Russian Communist Party may and must enter into BUSINESS RELATIONS with representatives of the bourgeoisie, with the capitalist world. The Soviet Government itself enters into business relations with the bourgeoisie, and these relations are certainly not regarded by the Executive Council of the Communist International as a betrayal of Communism.

The Soviet Ambassador may and must employ the services even of persons who do not subscribe to the program of the Communist Party.† The Soviet Government itself makes use of the services of such people. The Soviet Government widely employs all kinds of “specialists” — military specialists (former Tsarist officers), engineers, jurists, etc. The Soviet Government invites into its service not only non-party intellectuals but even Social Democratic-Internationalists, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries. These people do not work with us politically, but technically. In the same way the Soviet Ambassador may invite into

†- Particular reference here is to Finnish Socialist Santeri Nuorteva, a top Martens assistant with close personal ties to Socialist Party leader Morris Hillquit. Nuorteva was actively loathed by the hardliners of the Communist Party of America. Hillquit himself was briefly in the employ of the Russian Soviet Government Bureau as head of its legal department (appointed March 18, 1919). Hillquit was unable to actively participate in the Bureau’s affairs for reasons of health, however, and actual direction of the RSGB legal department was handled by Isaac A. Hourwich, father of CPA leader Nicholas I. Hourwich.

his service specialists, engineers, and jurists, independently of their political convictions.

On the question of party structure it is necessary to say the following:

The Party should not present a conglomeration of independent autonomous groups of “national federations.” There should be a united party, the Russian communist organizations should merge with this party, should be a part of it, and not a state within a state. The first and the last word in the American Labor Movement should belong to American workers and not to Russians, Letts [Latvians], and Finns.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International considers that the above, together with its resolutions on the questions of Parliamentarism and the relations towards the Trade Unions can serve as a basis for agreement

between the two parties. An agreement must be reached at all costs. A split in the American Communist Party is a severe blow to the International movement. We are convinced that if the American comrades would have thought of the consequences of their quarrels they would not have reached a split. We know that there are no profound reasons for a split, that the split was artificially created, by polemicizing and by subsidiary circumstances.

We are convinced that an agreement will be reached and that the American Communist Party will merge with the American [Communist] Labor Party.

The Executive Committee of the Communist International sends comradely greetings to American Communists.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

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