
The Task of the Hour

[circa June 1, 1922]

by Alfred S. Edwards

Signed “Sullivan,” published in *The Communist* [New York: Central Caucus-CPA Opposition], v. 1, no. 11 (June 1922), pp. 9-11. Specimen in the Harvard University collection.

At last the EC of the CI has made a decision on the controversy in the American movement. All the demands of the former minority of the CEC [Central Caucus-Opposition] have been granted: all our membership to be reinstated with full membership rights; party convention must be called; liquidators to be ruthlessly expelled; protection of the Comintern promised, and even reorganization of the whole American movement hinted at. In fact we are promised even more than we asked for. It seems we have won.

It would indeed have been a victory for us about 4 or 5 months ago, when our social-patriots and Centrists began to clean the party from their old enemies — formerly Bolsheviks, now Communists. By an accident the control over our party got into the hands of the former gas-socialists and social-patriots, now political prostitutes, who are for the Comintern as long as they can secure jobs for themselves and repudiate and denounce “communism, anarchy, and bolshevism” as destroyers of our glorious civilization as soon as there is no more money and when capitalism offers more. And one of these turncoats was appointed as the direct representative of the Comintern in America (as soon as that “job” ended he went to the police and confessed.)† It was only natural to expect that former Bolsheviks, who had fought this gang for 10 and 15 years in the Socialist Party, would not be tolerated in a CP controlled by their old and bitter enemies, consequently 5,000 members were expelled. The “experiment” of the Comintern in uniting Centrists and Communists that resulted in the 1921 Joint Unity Con-

vention [Woodstock: May 15-28, 1921] was a complete failure.

But what would have been a victory last December is a complete defeat for us now. After we have succeeded in organizing the expelled Communists into a strong party, after we have established our legal and illegal press and organizations and are beginning to “go to the masses” and gaining their confidence, in spite of the fact that the Centrists had on their side and were using the authority of the Comintern to sabotage our work; after all this the order to disband our organization and turn all our press, property, and organization over to the Mensheviks is nothing but a defeat. And this is done at a time when the Mensheviks have come to a complete intellectual, moral, and financial bankruptcy.

The word “defeat” is not strong enough in this case. It is a complete route, another St. Quentin peace. We are ordered to disarm completely. It means to disband our organizations, including Federation Bureaus elected by Federation Conferences, and turn over our “arms and ammunition” — press and printing plants — to the fake Bureaus appointed by the 7 Mensheviks, in violation of the Party constitution they had sworn to uphold.‡ It means to recognize and obey every whim and caprice of the District and Sub-District Organizers and District Committees, not elected by the District and SD Conferences, but appointed by the 7 Mensheviks, contrary to the spirit and letter of the Theses on Organization adopted by the 3rd World Congress of the Comintern [June 22-July 12, 1921].

†- Edwards’ reference is unclear here.

‡- The “7 Mensheviks” mentioned here denotes the CEC majority that formed in the summer of 1921: Jim Cannon, L.E. Katterfeld, Joseph Zack Kornfeder, Jay Lovestone, Joseph Stilson, Will Weinstone, and J. Wilenkin. Opposed to these 7 were 3 in the minority — the core of the Central Caucus-Opposition — George Ashkenuzi, John Ballam, and Charles Dirba.

It further means that after the surrender some 500 of our most active members will be expelled again, for the Mensheviks will have learned not to repeat the mistake of expelling 5,000 and invite the intervention of the Comintern. And last, but not least, it means to disrupt the Communist movement and disgrace the Comintern in this country for years to come.

The question for our party to decide now is not whether we obey or disobey the Comintern. The question for us to decide now is much more important: *Shall we knowingly and deliberately kill the Communist movement in this country and assist in building up a bankrupt Centrist organization*, that is already disgraced in the eyes of the class-conscious workers of America, and will betray the Comintern in time of crisis?

The LEGAL POLITICAL PARTY is the main bone of contention of the two factions. Our appeal to the Comintern stated that we are not opposed to a LPP on principle, but don't consider this as the proper time for it and are opposed to the method of organizing it, viz. the liquidation of the underground party. We demanded a Party convention to pass on and approve the plans of the LPP, as proposed by the CEC majority.

The EC of the CI instructed the CEC of the CPA to call the underground convention BEFORE launching the LPP. The same instructions were later repeated in a cablegram. The former majority of the CEC not only suppressed and ignored these orders from the 3 minority members of the CEC and the whole party, but also shamelessly circulated deliberate lies, that Com. L. [Lenin] had forbidden the holding of Party convention in the name and under the orders of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. The CEC of 7 did foresee its defeat at the party convention, hence all the above lies.

After the LPP was launched the Comintern had before it an accomplished fact and approved it. Naturally this action of the Comintern was based on the false reports received from the accomplished liars, Mr. Marshall [Bedacht], Carr [Katterfeld] & Co.† The reports of these modern Barons Munchausen are such masterpieces of lies and deception that we are tempted to quote some of the gems. We will stop first at the article of Mr. Carr [Katterfeld], published in The Com-

munist International No. 19 — “Some Facts on the CPA”:

They (Workers' Council group) have followers among HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of non-partyites, formerly members of the Socialist Party, whom they are trying to organize in the so-called Workers' Councils.... Just now they are attempting to organize 100,000 former members of the Socialist Party, promising them affiliation with the Third International without obligatorily joining the CPA. If their agitation under this slogan won't be stopped, it is to be feared that they may succeed in organizing a real Centrist party from elements that ought to be under the influence of our own legal organization.

The Party publishes 8 dailies and over 30 weekly, semi-weekly, and monthly magazines. Besides under the influence of the Party are some newspapers that are distributed in MILLIONS OF COPIES.

(On foreign language federations:) Before the war these organizations of foreigners constituted the backbone of the reactionary faction, led by Berger and Hillquit, and fought together with the Right Wingers against the so-called “Reds,” who tried to take the leadership of the Socialist Party in their hands. (Those who knew Mr. Carr [Katterfeld] in the Socialist Party know that he was a willing slave and prostitute of Berger and Hillquit while they had a soft job for him in the National Office, and fought the “Reds” bitterly. When the “foreigners” left and there was no more jobs in the SP, Mr. Carr [Katterfeld] and his kind offered their services to the Communists, who had to buy him, disregarding all objections on ethical grounds, just as the Communists in Russia had to buy bourgeois specialists. Happily we don't need the services of him and his kind any more — we have enough of real American-born *workers* in our ranks now.)

In the pamphlet *The Army of Comintern*, published by the CI, we find the following assertions regarding the American movement, supplied undoubtedly by Carr [Katterfeld] and Marshall [Bedacht]:

The CP has become the center of the workers movement in North America...its influence is increasing rapidly. The party publishes 8 daily newspapers...12 legal weekly and monthly periodicals in various languages in 100,000 copies, and the underground magazine in 14 languages, published twice a month in 50,000 copies. The Party has also strong influence in some large unions, with a membership of 900,000. The Party has under its influence practically the whole non-communist labor press....

The action of the Comintern was based on these lying reports to the effect that the 10,000 organized Communists can organize the HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of sympathizers seeking affiliation

†- Note the use of “Mr.” rather than “Comrade,” which signals an irreconcilable political antipathy.

with the Comintern. Each Communist will have to act as a teacher and instructor to 50 or 100 radical workers. It would indeed be a crime against the Communist movement to delay action and allow the Centrists to get such workers in their organization. Hence the order to join the LPP [WPA] immediately, especially as there is danger of its capture by real social-patriots and nationalists.

But is the LPP [WPA] worth capturing? We can answer this by asking another question: Is there anything to be captured?

There is the Federation press, for instance, but it is not to be captured. It is in the hands of the disciples of Kautsky, openly rejects and denounces the 21 points [required for affiliation to the Comintern], and dreams of the day of complete unity with the 2-and-a-Half International. It can never be captured by us, as its control is in the hands of private individuals, well known Centrists. The same holds true with the English weeklies, that even will go so far as to praise the good intentions of the imperialistic bandits gathered in Genoa. And the syncophants of the bourgeoisie writing this crazy and insane stuff also own these papers.

But perhaps we may capture the members of the LPP [WPA]? Again the answer must be in the negative. The whole membership of the LPP [WPA] is less than 10,000, even if our Carrs [Katterfelds] report about 100,000 Communists in New York City alone (according to L. Lore). The Communists who joined against their best judgment, under alleged orders from the General Staff [ECCI], won't be lost to the movement with the death of the LPP [WPA]. They will return to us without any capturing. As to the bunch of SP riff-raff and intellectual prostitutes from the ranks of the middle class — they are not worth capturing. Might just as well talk about the capture of Herr Kautsky by our German comrades.

The LPP [WPA] has no influence on the masses, and the more advanced elements of the working class have nothing but contempt for it. Take for instance the IWW, the organization that carried out successfully the principles of mass struggles long before Kautsky and Pannekoek began their discussions on this question. They know the fighting leaders of the LPP [WPA] are the former yellow Socialists that were active in expelling them from the Socialist Party as far

back as 1912. They know one of them, Charles Scott [Karlis Janson], direct representative of the Comintern in this country, who together with the rest of that bunch conducted active propaganda as late as the beginning of 1919 for the reconstruction of the yellow Second International. This explains mostly why they have come out against the Third International, judging it by its American representatives. The LPP [WPA] is either unknown or despised by the workers in America.

The capture of LPP [WPA] machinery is also impossible. The highest body is in control of Centrists. When, for instance, one of them comes out in the press with a statement of his great joy of possible unity with the 2-and-a-Half International, the "Communists" don't dare even to express their disagreement with his views, not to talk about censuring or repudiating him. The higher body APPOINTS the lower officials, who in turn control the whole organization. Joining them would mean an increase of dues and assessments to prolong the existence of this Centrist group and Centrist propaganda. As to capturing the machine — forget it!

As far as any real work is concerned the LPP [WPA] is dead. Our prediction has been fulfilled: all the time, means, and energy of the new "party" is spent in internal fights and squabbles, as can be foreseen by the fact that the LPP [WPA] united in its ranks elements from Communists to national-chauvinists (Zionists). Only the caucuses are active. Our joining would only add another caucus to all the others, who will undoubtedly present one united front of the one reactionary mass against use, in spite of their own petty squabbles.

By joining we will surely "capture" some of the unbearable stink and contempt and we don't like it. Might as well try to capture a live skunk.

OUR OWN PARTY has done some active Communist work in the meanwhile, in spite of the fact that the name and prestige of the Comintern has been on the side of the Centrists. The question to be decided now is whether we continue our Communist work and by doing so disobey the Comintern, or obey the Comintern and disband our organization.

The Comintern is dear to our hearts. We were the forerunners in America. We fought for its principles in this country, we defended and raised funds

for the Bolshevik faction when it split from the Social Democratic faction in the Russian Duma; we raised funds for Lenin's *Social Democrat* when it began its heroic fight in 1914 against the social-patriots, when it was steering "against the current," when it had to fight the Zimmerwald [Sept. 5-8, 1915] and Kienthal [Aug. 24-30, 1917] majorities. We were denounced for this as anarchists, syndicalists, and disrupters, Lenin was called a crazy hangman of Ivan the Terrible, by the same intellectual prostitutes that now call themselves for the time being representatives of the Comintern. We too knew how to swim against the current; even when the present LPP [WPA] leaders denounced us to the police for it (and they are resorting to the aid of the police even now, in order to take away our property). We did our duty then and we must do it now.

We must warn the Comintern not to listen to the lying reports of the American political prostitutes; not to believe Mr. Carr [Katterfeld] that the American army and navy is ready to revolt in case of another attack on Soviet Russia; not to believe that the Hearst newspaper syndicate is under the influence of the CPA. We must unmask the petty bourgeois traitors in this country, who will betray the movement in time of crisis, as their kind have done in Hungary and who even now offer themselves to the highest bidder.

If the Comintern is too far away to see the truth, if it is too busy with the more important problems of the revolutionary movement in India, Asia, Africa, and Western Europe and has only half an hour to spare for considering the American Question, and passes deci-

sions without getting acquainted at least with the documents presented by us (as reported by Comrade Moore [Ballam]), then our plain and unpleasant duty is to insist on a hearing, even if in order to do so we must appeal our case to the 4th Congress.

Joining the LPP [WPA] is out of the question. The author of these lines had an opportunity to appear before our membership meetings and hear the sentiment expressed there. And his conclusion is that the entire membership is opposed to joining the fake LPP [WPA], and is determined to maintain the only Communist Party in this country. Their class consciousness is stronger than even the sense of discipline, and they rightly claim that there are no rights without duties. The more power the Comintern has, the more its duty to investigate before deciding on important problems. And this was not done on the question of the LPP in America.

Obedying the Comintern means to disrupt the only Communist organization in this country and to strengthen the Centrists. It would be against the best interests of the Communist movement in America and consequently against the interests of the Comintern, and our members can not be forced to do it. The only way out is shown by our Party Conference [New York: May 8-12, 1922]: to continue our good Communist work and ask for a complete investigation from the Comintern. We love the Comintern, but we love still more the Communist movement.

Sullivan [A.S. Edwards].

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